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ABSTRACT

While there is reasonable agreement about some of the broad parameters of men's and women's marriages, less has been written about their perspectives on marriage, or about the individual characteristics associated with marital satisfaction. Data on marital adjustment, demographics, sex role identity, and sexuality were taken from 50 participants in a Family Relationship Project and from 72 participants in a Pregnancy and Parenting Project. Women's and men's views of their marriages were compared. Analysis of data from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Inventory revealed no significant differences between husbands and wives on marital adjustment. Occupation and education both appeared to be important factors in marital satisfaction, while neither number of children nor the years married related to marital satisfaction. Sex role findings seemed to suggest that self-described masculinity rather than femininity for both husbands and wives was associated with higher marital satisfaction. The findings fail to confirm differing degrees of marital satisfaction for men and women. (NRB)

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MEN'S AND WOMEN'S MARRIAGES

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, San Francisco, CA, October 16-20, 1984

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San Francisco, October 1984

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Men's and Women's Marriages

Introduction

Jesse Bernard (1973) has articulated what most couples know from the day they say, "I do": there exists at least two versions of a marriage, his and hers. In this paper, we looked at his and her marriages in two of the three projects. We were particularly interested in the relationships between aspects of individual characteristics and marital satisfaction for men and for women.

There is reasonable agreement about some of the broad parameters of men's and women's marriages. There is somewhat less written about their perspectives on marriage or about the individual characteristics associated with marital satisfaction. One set of repeated findings is that married men, compared to single men, live longer, achieve greater occupational success, have better mental health and lower suicide rates, whereas married women are not similarly favored over their single counterparts (e.g. Bernard, 1973; Melville, 1977).

In a later statement, Bernard (1982) summarizes the findings that more wives than husbands report "...marital frustrations and dissatisfaction; more...negative feelings; more...marital problems...consider their marriages unhappy, have considered separation or divorce..." (pg.) This view echos the findings of Campbell and his colleagues (1976) on the quality of American life. In their

sample, significantly more men than women were still in their first marriages, and significantly more men than women indicated that they were completely satisfied with their current marriages. While these findings probably reflect to some degree the recognized differences in the way women and men report on intimate matters, we suggest they also reflect real differences in experience. Marriage generally doesn't seem to work as well for women in this culture as it does for men.

Given this frame of reference, we looked to the data from the family projects - summarized in Table 1 -for pertinent findings. -

From the Family Relationship project, there were 3 groups, for the purposes of these analyses: Group 1, who averaged 24 years of age and had been married for 2 years, Group 2, who were on average 27 years old and married for 3.5 years, and Group 3, 28.5 years old and married 5.5 years, with an average of 2 children each. From the Pregnancy and Parenting Project, there was a group (4) that averaged 29 years, married an average of 5 years and averaged less than one child each, and Group 5, returning subjects from Group 4 approximately 5 1/2 years later.

In terms of data, two of the three projects had measures of marital adjustment, and also of variables we thought from the literature or our own research would be related to marriage. We chose to examine only those relationships for which there was identical or very similar data for both projects. These variables fall within the areas of demographics, sex role identity, and sexuality. In the remainder of this paper, we first examined simple comparisons between the women's and men's views of their marriages, and then addressed each of the three areas.

Comparisons of Marital Adjustment

The information on marital adapation came from the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) from all three groups from the Family Relationship Project, and the fifth year of the Pregnany and Parenthood Project, and the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Inventory (1959) from the first year of the Pregnancy and Parenthood Project.

Surprisingly, there were no significant differences between the husbands and wives on these measures. The only statistically significant differences related to time and the time-honored "disenchantment effect". Women and men described themselves as less satisfied with their marriages, the longer they were married. Thus these data provide no support for the view that married men and women inhabit different marriages.

Demographic Characteristics

Across both projects, there were five demographic areas we could compare for both samples. These included the individual variables of age, occupation, and education , and number of years married and number of children as marital dimensions.

These variables were correlated with the marital satisfaction scores(Table 2). Looking first at the women's age, there were three statistically significant correlations. In the third year sample without children from the Family Relationship Project, the older the woman, the more satisfied the wife and husband with the marriage. In contrast, older women in the Pregnancy and Parenthood Project were less satisfied with their marriages . There was only one significant correlate of men's age and marital satisfaction, and that was during

expectancy for the Pregnancy and Parenthood Project. The older the men, in that group, the less satisfied they were with their own marriages. It's hard to know what, if anything, to make of these findings, except to emphasize the apparent importance of life stage in determing the meaning of any demongraphic characteristic.

Neither the number of children nor the years married related to marital satisfaction, despite the group findings of a decline in satisfaction over time. The lack of findings for number of children is strange, since numerous researchers have found a decline in marital satisfaction associated with parenthood (e.g. Belsky, et al, 1983; Glenn & McLanahon, 1982). However, the lack of strong findings for these demographic variables is consistent with Rhyne's (1981) view that the variance in marital satisfaction lies in relationship issues rather than in demographic dimensions.

The husband's occupational status related significantly to marital satisfaction at several points. In the pregnancy visit of the Pregnancy and Parenthood Project, the higher the man's job status, the more satisfied his wife , and in the first visit of the Family Relationship Project, the higher the man's job status, the more satisfied the man with the marriage . The woman's occupation also had several significant correlates. In the first year of the Family Relationships Project, the higher the woman's occupational status, the lower her husband's marital satisfaction, but at the third year data collection point, the higher the woman's occupational status the more satisfied both husband and wife among couples without children, and the more satisfied the wife, among couples with children. Occupation appears to be an important variable in married life, with different meaning and different consequences

depending on age and stage of the individuals and the family.

Of the demographic variables we considered , besides occupational status, education was the strongest correlate, as others have found (e.g. Locksley, 1982). At all 5 data collection points, wives with more education were themselves more satisfied with the marriages, although only in the third year of the Family Relationship Project , for couples with children, did that correlation reach statistical significance . On the other hand, her education had little or no relationship to his satisfaction.

The husband's education strongly predicted his own marital satisfaction in the five year follow up of the Pregnancy and Parenthood Project, and his education level also predicted his wife's satisfaction, in both the expectancy visit and the five year followup of that same sample. The man's education seemed to play no role in marital satisfaction in the Family Relationships Project, which is a slightly younger group at an earlier stage of family development. One wonders if the husband's education plays some unique role in families with young children, with more educated men somehow responding differently to the demands of early parenthood. However, these findings are at best suggestive, because of the inconsistency across samples.

Sex Role Identity

While the sex role literature itself is vast, it too is relatively sparse in the area of marital adjustment. Murstein and Williams (1983), using the Bem to measure sex role and the Spanier to measure marital adjustment, in a sample similar to the younger group in the Family Relationship Project, found that androgynous men and women (i.e. those with high scores on both masculinity and

femininity) were most satisfied with their marriages. Men high on masculinity and women high on femininity were next, and lowest were the undifferentiated and cross sex typed individuals. In addition, they found that high scores on femininity for both men and women were associated with marital adjustment for both husbands and wives. High scores on masculinity for wives was also associated with marital adjustment in both men and women. Similarly, in an Australian study with a somewhat older sample, Antill (1983) found high femininity to be significantly associated with marital adjustment in both husbands and wives. After partialing out demographic variables, Antill found that the wives' femininity played less of a role in the husband's marital adjustment than the husband's femininity played in the wife's happiness.

While the subtle differences in findings between these two studies may be a function of cultural, socioeconomic and educational differences between the two samples, the results may as well be a reflection of disparities between the groups with regard to stage in the life cycle. Recent attention by social scientists to adult development and to a life span developmental perspective suggests the importance of considering individual and family stage when examining such variables as marital adjustment and sex role identity.

Looking at couples by life stage, Feldman, et al (1981) found no differences between married people with no children, expectant couples and young parents on femininity and masculinity except that women were more feminine when new parents than women at earlier stages of family life. Abrahams et al (1978) compared four groups (cohabitors, married, expectants, parents) and found that for husbands, masculinity

was consistent across all situations, while it decreased for the wives over these life stages.

In the present investigation, we had Bem Sex Role Identity scores for five age and marital status groups from the two projects, and were able to compare them with our measures of marital adjustment (Table 3).

As might be expected (Table 1), wives consistently scored higher on femininity than masculinity, while husbands scored higher on masculininity in all groups. Looking at Pearson correlations, the woman's Femininity score was significantly related in only one of 10 correlations: the higher the self-described femininity of the women in Group2 from the Family Relationship Project, the lower her assessment of the marriage no other relationships approach significance, leading us to conclude that a woman's self-described femininity has little relationship to her or her husband's own marital contentment.

Women's Masculinity scores showed 2 significant relatonships, both strong. The more masculine the women's self-description, the greater her marital satisfaction for women in the youngest group of the Family Relations Project, and the more satisfied the men in the five year follow up from the Pregnancy and Parenthood Project. Women's masculinity, more than their femininity, seems related to their own and their spouse's marital satisfaction, in contrast to Antill's (1983) findings.

The more stereotypically feminine the men's self-description, the greater their marital adjustment in Group 2 from the Family Relations Project ; no other correlations were significant. Again, as with the women, femininity, as measured by the Bem, seems to

have little to do with marital satisfaction.

Finally, the men's masculinity predicted negatively to the woman's marital satisfaction in the first group from the Family Relations Project and had no other significant correlations.

We then looked to see whether there were meaningful trends in these correlations by life stage. Intriguingly, there was only one statistically significant relationship out of a possible 24 among the groups with children between sex role identity and marital satisfaction, while for younger couples without children, 4 out of 16 correlations reached statistical significance. The family system becomes much more complex once children are included, and culturally stereotypical characteristics such as measured by the Bem seem largely irrelevant to the hurly burly of family life.

Sexuality

Turning to our last area, sexuality, the literature is quite thin when one seeks more detail than that contained in the Kinsey or Masters and Johnson surveys. Yet most writers on marriage agree that sexuality is important, and many believe it is central to a good marital relationship (e.g. Bleinstein& Schwart, 1983). (Although Greenblatt, 1983, concluded from his in depth study of 80 people married five years or less, that although they said that marital sexuality was very important to them, it really didn't seem to matter very much in how their lives were going.)

In the few findings that do exist on sex differences concerning sexuality in marriage, recent literature suggests that women tend to be more sexually fulfilled in marriage, while men are more satisfied with other marital dimensions, such as help from their spouse,

friendship, etc. (Rhyne, 1981).

In these studies, the two scores related to sexuality were different. The Family Relationship Project had a Sexual Intimacy Score, reflecting an individual's psychosocial maturity in sexual relationships, and those data were available for Groups 2 and 3, that is the third year groups with and without children (Table 4). For the couples without children, men's Sexual Intimacy was significantly and strongly correlated with both their own and their wives' marital adjustment, and the women's Sexual Intimacy was significantly associated with their husbands' marital adjustment. For the couples without children, Group 3, there were no significant correlations.Thus these data suggest in marriages without children, for men, the sexual aspect of their relationship is an important aspect of their marriage, or at the least reflects importantly on that relationship both from their own and their wives' points of view. Married men who are psychologically mature and interpersonally responsive in their sexual lives are satisfied with their marriages and have satisfied wives. For their wives, their assessed Sexual Intimacy did not relate to their view of their marriage. One wonders if sexuality is less central to women's marital satisfaction. The lack of findings for the couples with children attests to the greater complexity of the family system once children are introduced. Marital relationships change, and not least in the role and meaning of sexuality.

The Sexual Activity and Satisfaction score from the Pregnancy and Parenthood Project has more emphasis on the amount of sexual activity engaged in, although it also includes the importance of, and satisfaction with, the couple's sexual

relationship. In the data from the early pregnancy contacts, the only significant correlation was between men's Sexual Activity and Satisfaction and their own marital satisfaction. Again, for men, the sexual componenet seems to be an important part of their own evaluation of the marriage.

The lack of significant relationship between men's or women's sexuality and the women's marital satisfaction is consistent with the Family Relationship Project data. However, some caution in interpreting these findings is necessary, since the data were collected during early pregnancy, which has distinct effects on a couple's sexual relationship (e.g. Grossman, Eichler, & Winickoff, et al, 1980).

The findings from the five year follow up are puzzling. Both men's and women's sexual scores correlated significantly with the women's marital adjustment but not the men's. The most likely explanation relates to the fact that these couples are parents of one or several children and have been for at least five years. The stresses this puts on the marital relationship are well documented (e.g. Belsky, 1983), and are more severe for women than for men. For women in particular, the risk to the marriage is that they become overly engrossed in their relationship with their child or children, and lose the fintensity and involvement with their spouse. Possibly it is in this context that women who maintain a stronger sexual tie also have maintained a stronger involvement with their marriage (As an aside, in the data from the Pregnancy and Parenthood Project, these couples who have maintained a stronger sexual relationship tend to be doing less well with the tasks of parenting young children.)

The most salient conclusion from a look at the literature and the data from these two studies is that too little is known about marital sexuality and its role in marital satisfaction.

Conclusion

We fail to find confirmation for different "his" and "her" marriages-- at least men and women in this study don't describe their degree of marital satisfaction differently. We do, however, find differences in those attributes that are associated with men's and women's marriages.

Maturity in intimacy and sexuality seem to be more important in general, in men's than in women's marital satisfaction. Yet, there is the suggestion later in young people's marriages, where there are children, that women's marital adjustment is strongly associated with both their own and their husband's sexual satisfaction.

Sex role findings, while somewhat equivocal, seem to say that self-described masculinity rather than femininity for both husbands and wives is associated with the degree of marital satisfaction.

We confirmed some expectable relationships: occupational level matters, and wives' occupational level is not always associated with more marital satisfaction. Level of education matters, usually in a positive direction.

The longitudinal data underline the importance of taking into account a life span perspective, even when the span is brief. These aspects of women's and men's lives, including their marital satisfactions, change as their individual and family lives' change and develop.

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Footnotes

1 All p values are for 2 tailed tests of significance.

Table 1

Measures Used to Assess Marriage

Family Relationship Project

First Year

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976)
Sex Role (Bem, 1974)
Age
Occupation
Education

Third Year

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976)
Sex Role (Bem, 1974)
Intimacy (White, 1983)

Pregnancy and Parenthood Project

Early Pregnancy

Marital Adjustment (Locke & Wallace, 1959)
Sex Role (Bem, 1974)
Sexual Activity and Enjoyment (Grossman, et al, 1980)
Age
Occupation
Education

Five Year Follow-up

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976)

Table 2

Pearson Correlations Among Marital Adjustment Scores and Five Demographic Variables

	Group 1 Fam Rel 1st Year (No children) n=17		Group 2 Fam Rel 3rd Year (no children) n=19		Group 3 Fam Rel 3rd Year (w/ children) n=14		Group 4 Pregnancy (n=37-39)		Group 5 5 Yrs Post-Part (n=33)	
	Marital Adjustment									
	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband
Wife's Age	-.12	.17	.43*	.43*	-.08	-.08	.11	.06	-.32*	-.1.
Husband's Age	-.12	.09	.11	.12	.07	-.12	-.12	-.30**	-.13	.08
Wife's Occupation	.21	.58**	-.47*	-.47*	-.52*	-.15	-.08	-.05	-.03	-.30
Husband's Occupation	.09	-.54**	-.17	-.21	.13	.19	-.31**	-.10	-.22	-.21
Wife's Education	.18	-.05	.36	.31	.39	.09	.30	-.01	.24	.18
Husband's Education	-.01	.33	.27	.34	-.08	.20	.45**	.19	.38*	.46**
Years Married	n.a.	n.a.	.06	-.09	.30	-.27	-.07	-.17	-.01	.06
Number of Children	-	-	-	-	-.34	-.15	-.15	-.21	.12	.19

***p<.001
**p<.01
*p<.05

Table 3

Pearson Correlations Among Bem Masculinity and Femininity Scores
and Marital Adjustment Total Scores Across Five Groups

	Group 1 Fam Rel 1st Year (No children) n=17		Group 2 Fam Rel 3rd Year (no children) n=19		Group 3 Fam Rel 3rd Year (w/ children) n=14		Group 4 Pregnancy (n=37-39)		Group 5 5 Yrs Post-Part (n=33)	
	Marital Adjustment									
	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband
Wife										
Femininity	.01	-.10	-.39*	-.08	.16	-.08	.20	.03	.27	.04
Masculinity	.72***	.35	.25	.15	.22	-.17	.18	.23	.25	.51**
Husband										
Femininity	.28	.16	.15	.39*	-.27	-.39	-.16	.11	-.21	-.02
Masculinity	-.58**	.05	-.19	.08	.10	.33	.06	.03	-.02	-.12
$\bar{X}$ age	24	24	27	27.5	28	29	28	30	34	35
$\bar{X}$ yrs. married	2		3.68		5.50		5.12		10.42	

***p<.001 2 tailed
** p<.01 2 tailed
* p<.05 2 tailed